

Finding Our Way in a Corrupt World

Psalm 14

John Edward Huth wrote a hefty book called, *The Lost Art of Finding Our Way*. He argues that long before GPS and Google Maps humans traveled vast distances using environmental clues and simple instruments. Technology, says Huth, has become a substitute for our innate ability to find our way. He posits that, perhaps, the human brain is changing and losing its ability to create cognitive maps that aid us in knowing if we are going in the right direction.

We all have probably felt the utter despair of being misguided by GPS and continuing to faithfully follow its directives, even when we know they are wrong.

There is a metaphorical application of the idea of *losing our way* or more positively, *finding our way*. Have you noticed that if you stay off Twitter, Facebook and news sites, you simply feel better, think better, love others more, and have a generally more positive outlook regarding the future and your personal well-being in it? It is a wonder to think, *Why do we keep doing what makes us feel so badly?* We know that social media and the news media are filled with misinformation, yet we follow on just like we continue to heed Google Map's misdirection.

I fear that today many are losing their way. More evangelical preaching is guided by social media than by the Bible. Have we forgotten the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture?

Psalm 14ⁱ is a good psalm to help the people of God find their way in whatever time they live. This psalm orientsⁱⁱ the people of God in the world. It is the North Star for the Christian traveler. It is all too easy to become disoriented in life, to lose our bearings, and get off track especially when a thousand voices are telling us what we should think, how we should feel, and what we should do.

This psalm presents us with a picture of the righteous living in a godless, threatening world. It bids us to back up from the details and look at the whole map. Stop looking at the trail and look up at the sun to get direction. How can we find our way in a world that is characterized by corruption? This psalm assures us that God will not only sustain his people in this corrupt world, he will give them reason to rejoice and be glad.

How can we find our way in this hostile world?

1. We must realize the unvarnished truth about the state of mankind (1)

This psalm backs us up from the particular act of evildoers and confronts us with the truth of the pervasive depravity of mankind. In doing so the psalm explains to us not simply the way things are but why things are the way they are. We focus on symptoms as if they are the cause, and then wonder why the disease doesn't get better.

The psalm presents to us that unsavory character of wisdom literature, *the fool* (1a). The *fool* in question in the psalm is not a particular *fool* but a representative fool. That becomes clear in the next line, *They are corrupt*. The antecedent to *they* (1b) is the *fool* (1a). The fool is a category of humans. Mankind in rebellion against God is classified as *the fool*.

A. The fool denies God's interest in the affairs of life

The psalmist allows us to hear the internal voice of the fool. He let us see his inner life, the thought of his mind and will. Not in outward confession but in inner volition, *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."* You can explain all of his activity by his internal creed. The chief characteristic of the fool is his decision to live as if there is no God. He is not a theoretical atheist, one who on the basis of reason concludes that God does not exist. There were no theoretical atheist in the ancient world. No. He is much worse. He is a practical atheist. God is of no consequence in his life. He thinks that God is not involved with the daily affairs of life. He reasons that he has no accountability, no one to answer to in the end.

Unfortunately, we have of late had many occasions to see people who live in total disregard for God. The person who lives as if there is no god is the one who puts his knee on the neck of the image of God and holds it there while life ebbs away.ⁱⁱⁱ The person who lives in total disregard for God is the young man in St. Louis who shot and killed a retired police captain working as a security guard for a local business.^{iv} The mayors of NYC and Chicago both of whom threatened to close churches permanently if they gathered during the pandemic have reasoned in their hearts, *There is no God*. The person who looks both ways and then runs into a Target store with windows broken out in order grab what he can is not a person who is meting out justice on capitalistic oppressors giving them what they deserve, he is a thief and lives as if there is no God. If you want to make a difference be like Bevelyn Beatty and Edmee Chavannes who were handcuffed on the sidewalk outside the Margaret Sanger Planned Parenthood Center in Manhattan for violating social-distancing mandates. They were protesting, in their own words, *the thousands of George Floyds that die every day in their mother's womb, and it's just as unjust as when he died at the hands of that police officer.*^v

The point the psalmist makes is that there is no shortage of examples of people who live as if there is no God. This did not recently become the case but it has been the case since Adam decided to live independently of God. That is the back story of what we see unfolding before our eyes. We do not live in exceptional circumstances. We are not a generation that has witnessed more injustice than any other generation. The reality is there are many injustices that have been perpetrated in the time we have been here that you do not know anything about and have no power to correct. But everyone of them has happened under the gaze and to the displeasure of the Almighty. And the answer is that sinners must be born again by the power of the Spirit of God!

Perhaps you have lived as if there is no God. Many who claim to be Christians may be living as if daily life is totally irrelevant to God. The man who commits adultery, views pornography, abuses drugs and alcohol, neglects prayer and the Word, disregards the church, refuses to give, what is he but a man who lives as if there is no God, while outwardly professing to be a Christian.

B. The fool is internally corrupt and externally vile

The fool's confession comes from his internal corruption. Verse 1b shows us what comes out of the heart of the fool living out his unholy confession. It is impossible to live as if there is no God and come away unscathed. The one who ignores God cannot simply live a life of self-indulgence, but he becomes corrupt and perverse.

First, *they are corrupt*. The psalmist is deliberately using language that recalls the Flood narrative. *And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth* (Gen. 6:12). The point the psalmist is making is that the Flood did not fix the corruption of mankind.^{vi} The present generation is as corrupt as that generation. The reason God does not send a flood to remove corrupt mankind from the earth in judgment is not because man is not as bad as in the days of Noah, but because atonement has been made in the covenant with Noah that has created an window for rebellious humanity to continue. In that gracious window of history, between the judgment of the Flood and final judgment, we see God working out his plan of redemption.

Now in the present time, *God commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead* (Acts 17:30-31). The Flood stands in Scripture as a type of the judgment to come. The fool pursues corruption because he reasons that God is not concerned with the affairs of his life. The reality is the fool is storing up wrath against the day of wrath (Romans 2:25).

Internal corruption leads to external acts of vileness: *They do abominable deeds*. So the evidence is conclusive, *There is none who does good*. No human can stand before holy God. One may argue that humans do good all the time. The good humans do does not answer the corruption of their hearts. Human good is tainted with human corruption. The truth is, we have never seen pure good. To see an example of good, true good, we must look to Jesus.

The psalmist looks on the world of mankind and says, *They are pervasively corrupt. None is good*. So first, we hear the confession of the fool's heart, *There is no God*. You cannot dismiss God and have a good and wonderful life. You can dismiss God, but you cannot avoid him forever. We must realize the truth about the state of mankind.

2. We must remind ourselves of God's assessment of mankind (2-6).

We have a tendency to forget how God views the world in rebellion against him. We keep saying to the world, *Why won't you do better?* What we need to say to the world is, *Why won't you repent? There is a God in heaven who judges the affairs of man and his omniscient gaze is on you.*

A. God's assessment (2-3)

The psalmist not only looked at the world of mankind and said, *Something is wrong*, he recounts how the LORD checked the situation out thoroughly (2a). To communicate the LORD's unchanging and eternal displeasure with mankind, the psalmist uses figurative language: *The LORD looks down from heaven on the son of Adam's race to see* (2a). The psalmist is using the Bible's language that calls to mind the judgment on Babel and Sodom. In the Babel narrative the Scripture says, *And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built* (Gen. 11:5). In the Sodom narrative, the Scripture says, *I will go down to see whether that have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me* (18:21).

What is the LORD looking for? He is looking to see if any in Adam's race *understands*, to see if anyone is wise, one with moral and religious good sense.^{vii} This is the opposite of being *the fool*. The second line further clarifies what it means to be one who *understands*. It means one *who seeks after God*. To act in wisdom is to inquire after, to search out, to seek to know the LORD.

The result of the LORD's search is *all have turned aside, become corrupt; none does good, not even one* (3). The human race apart from God is universally corrupt and pervasively depraved. Divine omniscience cannot find one exception to the sad story of humankind.

This brings the reality home. Not merely a few among men are to be numbered among *the fools*. Outside of Christ, all men are *fools*. You cannot do a more foolish thing than to stay in your sin.

B. God astonishment (4)

The question of verse 4 is rhetorical and drives home the point. God does not ask questions to gain information. Rather, verse 4 expresses the astonishing reality that *evildoers* are insensible to the error of their ways and their precarious situation. We heard the voice of the fool in verse 1. Now we hear the voice of the LORD in verse 4.

Mankind does not realize the enormous guilt he carries. God says, *They eat up my people as they eat bread*. They devour the LORD's people as easily as they sit down to eat bread. They are like a contract killer who goes out to dinner.^{viii}

If they had any sense of their situation and who the LORD (*they have no knowledge*) is they would *call on the Name of the LORD* (Joel 2:32; Romans 10:13) because whoever calls on the Name of the LORD will be saved. But they push the thought of God out of their minds. They have no sense of accountability.

C. God's answer (5-6)

When the LORD answers the wicked for their deeds, *There they are in great terror*. Literally, the text reads, *they fear with fear or they panic with panic*.^{ix} The psalmist highlights the miscalculation of the wicked. They have assumed God is not involved in the affairs of life, that he takes no note of them, when the reality is that he is present *with the generation of righteous*. The picture is of suddenly in a moment being gripped with the terror of the avenging presence of God. It is to come face to face with one's foolish life when it is too late.

C.S. Lewis said, *In the end that Face which is the delight or the terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or the with the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised*.^x

The LORD's answer to *the fool* is presented in a different way in verse 6. They would put to shame *the plan* (counsel, purpose, ie. his trust in the LORD) of the poor, only to find that the LORD is his refuge. The poor is set in contrast to the fool. The poor is not the socio-economic poor any more than the fool is the unintelligent. The fool has no trust in God. The poor is the one who puts all his hope in God. He has no alternative but to trust in the LORD. The plan of the poor is how they might know the LORD, how they might take refuge in the LORD in the corrupt world of mankind.

Here is the utter frustration of the wicked, no matter how they try to disrupt the plan of the poor they cannot because they are fighting against the LORD. He is their hope, their shelter, their trust.

This is God's assessment of mankind. In this corrupt world, he is with his people, and he is their refuge.

3. We must realize that our hope must be set on another world (7).

This psalm leads to a proper explanation of the why the world is how it is and to God's view of it. With that in the background, the psalm compels us to pray for the coming of God's kingdom. We have the answer. *Zion* is a synonym for the place where God is present. The psalmist says he is with the righteous and is their refuge. He is our salvation, and the salvation of any who will believe in him. He is the only salvation to be had.

How are we as believers to respond surrounded in and to a world of corruption? Where is our hope to be placed? What enables the righteous to endure this world is the anticipation of the coming day salvation that will bring relief and joy and the just judgment of the wicked. On the one hand, we want to stand for justice and on the side of right in this world. On the other hand, if your well-being and happy adjustment depends on everybody playing nice, you will come to despair. You can't ultimately hope in God and reject the hopelessness of man outside of Christ.

The best thing you can do for your neighbor is not tell him to be nice but tell him to repent. The grievance culture is antithetical to hoping in God. Paul quotes from this Psalm in Romans 3 to argue for the universal guilt and pervasive depravity of mankind. Paul encourages us to be realistically hopeless about humanity and grateful for what God has done in Christ.^{xi}

The LORD will *restore the fortunes^{xii} of his people*. A great reversal is coming. There will be *rejoicing and gladness* among the people of God. The LORD will right every wrong. Now is a time, when communities are fragmenting, for the people of God set their hope on another world and to direct their neighbors to hope in the LORD. As pressing and troubling as these things are, the world has a much bigger problem than pandemics and abusive policemen and riots and looting in the streets. The worse thing that can happen to a person is to go to hell. Soon everybody is going to stand before the righteous judge and panic of panic, terror of terror will seize them or joy of joys will be theirs forever.

ⁱ Psalm 14 is not a conventional psalm. It does not fit the categorical classifications of most psalms. It's not a lamentⁱ although it has a bit of a complaint. Laments or songs of disorientation give us permission to bear our souls. They almost always move from the negative to the positive, from plea to praise. Only two laments do not follow this pattern: Psalms 44 and 88. See Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook*, 150-151. It has some features of a wisdomⁱ psalm but not all the elements of wisdom (cf. Ps. 1). Wisdom psalms are characterized wisdom formula and sayings and wisdom themes: the way of the righteous, the way of the wicked, the contrast between the wise and foolish, practical advice, and the fear of the Lord (Futato, 172). The psalm is a unique drawing on the features of different types of Psalms to give us its simple message. There are times when the conventional expressions of prayer or praise do not adequately express our experiences. This psalm gives a voice to the sufferer grappling for explanation, expression, and faith.

ⁱⁱ The psalm rests nicely in Brueggeman's category of psalms of orientation.

ⁱⁱⁱ On May 25, 2020, Minneapolis police Lieutenant Derek Chauvin held his knee on the neck of George Floyd for more than 7 minutes which led to Floyd's death.

^{iv} 24 year old Stephan Cannon murdered retired St. Louis police Captain David Dorn in recent riots. Cannon was sentenced to 7 years in prison in 2014 for felony robbery. His sentence was suspended and he never saw jail time. He violated his probation twice but was offered leniency by the court and never went to jail.

^v The article appeared in the June 10 edition of DSRN.com. *Pro-life women handcuffed outside Planned Parenthood for social distancing violation while BLM protests rage.* <https://disrn.com/news/pro-life-women-handcuffed-outside-planned-parenthood-for-social-distancing-violation-the-same-week-george-floyd-protests-rage>

^{vi} In cutting a covenant with Noah after the Flood, the Scripture says, *And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma (the atonement sacrifice) the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth"* (Gen. 8:21).

^{vii} Goldingay, *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Wisdom and Psalms*, 213.

^{viii} *Ibid.*, 215.

^{ix} *Pahad* is used twice together—fear fear. It is a strengthened form. See Goldingay, 215.

^x C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 38., quoted in Kidner, *TOTC Psalms*, 96.

^{xi} Goldingay, 217.

^{xii} Older translations read, *When the LORD brings back the captivity of his people*. Such a reading led some to assign this psalm to the exile with the hope of the return from captivity. ESV is a better translation of *sebut* from *sub* which means *turn a turning or restoring a former state of prosperity*, so it is easy to see why older translations read as they did.